

Plays for Reading

Reading for Proficiency Series



# DESIGN FOR DRAMA

SHORT PLAYS FROM AMERICAN LITERATURE

HELAINÉ MICHAELS KLEIN

HIGH INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED LEVEL

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FOR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE



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# DESIGN FOR DRAMA

## SHORT PLAYS BASED ON AMERICAN LITERATURE

By HELAINE MICHAELS-KLEIN

Reading Proficiency Through Play Reading

For Students of English  
At The High Intermediate/Advanced Level

Office of English Language Programs  
United States Department of State  
Washington, DC

# **Design for Drama: Short plays based on American Literature**

by Helaine Michaels-Klein

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## INTRODUCTION

Characters from American literature come to life in this collection of radio and television plays, and in some instances, e.g., *The Devil and Tom Walker* and *The Black Cat*, speak to the reader directly. We also offer the foreign reader a sampling of American writers from diversified backgrounds and locales.

Henry James (1843-1916), an American who spent a good portion of his life in England, tells of a young Victorian girl's strong reactions to her widowed father's impending marriage in *The Marriages*. In this piece we can see James' perception of the Victorian era—its charm and hypocrisy. In *The Furnished Room*, O. Henry (1862-1910) takes us to the lower west side of New York City at the turn of the century. We meet first- and second-generation Irish Americans and learn of one young man's plight when he falls hopelessly in love. Washington Irving (1783-1859) takes us to the northeast part of the United States known as New England, and in *The Devil and Tom Walker*, Tom, himself, tells us of his greedy pursuits and how, after making a deal with the Devil, he suffers the inevitable consequences. From here we switch to the grotesque world of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), where in *The Black Cat* we meet a pitiful character that we have named Ignatius Groper, an alcoholic who destroys everything around him and eventually himself. In *A Horseman in the Sky*, Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914) takes us to the southern part of the United States, where we meet a young Civil War soldier named Carter Druse who is confronted with a devastating choice to make. In the midst of this conflict, he makes a heartbreaking decision. *Richard Cory*, by Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869-1935), is the only piece in our collection based on a poem rather than a short story. In this adaptation we have taken the liberty of building a plot around the poem to hypothesize what might have prompted the hero's suicide. This plot was inspired by Robinson's famous poem, which surely stands on its own as a literary masterpiece.

## SUGGESTED TEACHER GUIDELINES

The plays in this collection are intended for radio and television. In the classroom, teachers may utilize a number of approaches to invite student participation. Those who wish to perform as directors and actors can be assigned parts or the teacher might “audition” them and then assign roles. For the radio plays, the teacher might want to have the actors stand in front of either real or simulated microphones just as legitimate radio actors do. If a tape recorder is available, it would be a good idea to record the play and play it back for the students. If certain words are troublesome, that part of the tape can be re-recorded until the student makes the word understandable. For the TV plays, the teacher might first have the students do a read-through of the script from their seats, and after they have familiarized themselves with the dialogue, the teacher can assign someone as the director and ask him/her to do some minimal blocking of the stage area. One or two rehearsals should take place, and following this, the students should be told to stay in character as much as possible and look away from their scripts often so that they can be expressive.

Students who are not primarily interested in directing and acting can serve in other areas—camera crew, audio technicians, costumes, make-up, sound effects, etc. To offer even more creativity, the teacher might want to simulate a real radio or television production by asking the students to invent products and write and act out the commercials.

Another creative exercise would be in the area of sound effects. The teacher might ask students to create the sound of a horse galloping or a gust of wind. The teacher can provide easier-to-produce sound effects such as doorbells, knocks, etc., and put two or three students in charge of cueing them in.

As far as costuming is concerned, complete period costumes are not necessary, but the students might enjoy wearing hats or draping themselves in fabrics to suggest the period of the play. One of the students can be assigned either to design, make, or bring in clothing or fabric from home which might be appropriate.

For the TV productions, several students could pantomime cameras, follow the script, and move in on actors for close-ups and away from them for long-shots, just to get an idea of the concentration jobs like this entail. Since they would be required to follow the script very carefully, it would also be a reading exercise.

Although not all of these plays have narrators, it would be a good idea to assign someone to read the camera and music directions, as some of the dramatic action is performed totally by the camera in TV productions. Also, if someone in the class plays a musical instrument, he/she might want to bring it to class and play the background music; records or tapes can also be used. If, perchance, video recording equipment is available, the production can be taped.

There is no limit to how a teacher might elaborate on these plays. However, all of the above are merely suggestions, and a simple straight reading would also be beneficial.

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A HORSEMAN IN THE SKY by Ambrose Bierce (A radio play)

RICHARD CORY by Edwin Arlington Robinson (A television play)

# THE MARRIAGES

By  
Henry James

Adapted for Television by Helaine Michaels Klein

# THE MARRIAGES

## CHARACTERS

MRS. CHURCHLEY  
COLONEL CHART  
ADELA CHART  
GODFREY CHART  
BEATRICE CHART  
MURIEL CHART  
MISS FLYNN (GOVERNESS)  
THE VISITOR (MRS. GODFREY)  
WOMAN PARTY GUEST

## SCENE 1

*Fade in—Exterior—High angle panning shot; London: slow-motion shot of funeral proceedings for Mrs. Chart. (19th century-type background music). Family is shown around flower-covered casket. Titles begin. Slow-motion pan of family in months following mother's funeral. Colonel Chart, Adela, Godfrey, in drawing room (reading, needlepointing, etc.); two younger children, Beatrice and Muriel, running in the fields. Close up of leaves falling off of trees indicating a change of season. Dissolve to a party scene attended by Colonel Chart and Adela. (Quick pan of banquet room—crystal chandeliers, flowers, tapestry, etc.) Adela is holding her/father's arm as he chats with other party guests.*

WOMEN PARTY GUEST: (to *Adela*) I was so sorry to hear about your dear mother; how long has it been now, dear?

ADELA: (*looking downward; sad*) Six months.

*Colonel Chart, Adela, and the hostess, Mrs. Churchley exit banquet room and enter foyer.*

MRS. CHURCHLEY: Won't you stay a little longer?

COLONEL: Of course every one's going on to something else. I believe there are a lot of things tonight.

MRS. CHURCHLEY: And where are *you* going?

COLONEL: Oh I don't do that sort of thing.

ADELA: (*to Mrs. Churchley*) Surely you must be going on somewhere yourself.

COLONEL: Yes, you must have a lot of places.

MRS. CHURCHLEY: No, no, I have no plans at all. Do stay a little. I always think this is such a nice hour. One can really talk.

COLONEL: *(laughingly)* Ah, but it isn't fair.

MRS. CHURCHLEY: *(placing Adela on chair)* Do sit down; it's the only time to have any talk. *(Adela resists; wanders away)*

COLONEL: I'm afraid Adela's a bit anxious. We'll have to say good night now. *(calling to Adela)* I say, Adela, we must release this dear lady.

*Close up of Adela, as she scrutinizes Mrs. Churchley. Music comes up as Colonel Chart kisses Mrs. Churchley's hand; looks tenderly into her eyes. Adela, looking indignant, observes this. He releases her gently, takes Adela's arm as they leave Mrs. Churchley's house.*

## SCENE 2

*Quick shot of carriage taking them home. Close up of the Colonel and Adela riding home in silence. Dissolve to father and daughter in foyer of their home. There is a silent strain between them.*

COLONEL: *(coldly)* Good night.

ADELA: Good night.

*Adela ascends stairs to her brother's study; she peeks in and sees him at his desk. Close up of Godfrey as he discovers her there.*

GODFREY: Adela, Isn't it rather late for you?

ADELA: Father's going to marry Mrs. Churchley, you know.

GODFREY: How do you know?

ADELA: I've seen with my eyes. We've been dining there—we've just come home. He's in love with her. She's in love with *him*. They'll arrange it.

GODFREY: Oh I say. *(lights cigarette at mantelpiece)*

ADELA: He will, he will, he will. *(bursts into tears)* He oughtn't to—he oughtn't to. Think of mamma—think of mamma, *(wailing loudly)*

GODFREY: Yes, someone should think of mamma. *(looks at tip of cigarette)*

ADELA: To such a woman as that—after *her*.

GODFREY: Dear old mamma.

ADELA: *(rising, drying her eyes)* It's like an insult to her; it's as if he denied her. He rubs out at a stroke all the years of their happiness.

GODFREY: *(agreeably)* They were awfully happy.

ADELA: Think what she was—think how no one else will ever be like her again.

GODFREY: I suppose he's not very happy now.

ADELA: Of course he isn't, any more than you and I are; and it's dreadful of him to want to be.

GODFREY: Well, don't make yourself miserable till you're sure.

ADELA: Of course, I'm sure. One could tell from the way they behaved together. And also father's attitude on the drive back home from her house last evening. Oh, she's so, so public, She's so, so...florid, promiscuous and mannish.

GODFREY: (*wanting to get on with his work*) Oh I dare say she's all right.

ADELA: All right? All right to come and take darling mamma's place—to sit where *she* used to sit, to lay her horrible hands on *her* things?

GODFREY: Oh, I just mean that nothing will come of it.

ADELA: No. Not if we do our duty. You must speak to him—tell him how we feel; that we shall never forgive him, that we can't endure it.

GODFREY: He'll think I'm cheeky.

ADELA: Cheeky to plead for *her* memory?

GODFREY: He'll say it's none of my business.

ADELA: Then you believe he'll do it?

GODFREY: Not a bit. Go to bed.

ADELA: *I'll* speak to him.

GODFREY: Don't cry out till you're hurt; wait till he speaks to *you*.

ADELA: He won't, he won't. He'll do it without telling us.

GODFREY: (*lighting another cigarette*) Is Mrs. Churchley very rich?

ADELA: I haven't the least idea. What on earth has that to do with it?

GODFREY: (*puffing on his cigarette*) Does she live as if she were?

ADELA: She has a lot of hideous showy things.

GODFREY: Well, we must keep our eyes open. And now you *must* let me get on.  
(*kisses her*)

ADELA: (*burying her head on his shoulder*) Ah why did she leave us? Why did she leave us?

GODFREY: Yes, why indeed? (*disengaging himself with a movement of oppression*)

### SCENE 3

(*Colonel and Adela at breakfast*)

COLONEL: Adela, have you been to call on Mrs. Churchley?

ADELA: No indeed, why should I?

COLONEL: Don't you call on people after you dine with them?

ADELA: Yes, in the course of time. I don't rush off within the week.

COLONEL: (*coldly*) Then you'll please rush off tomorrow. She's to dine with us on the 12th, and I shall expect your sisters to come down.

ADELA: To a dinner party?

COLONEL: It's not to be a dinner party. I want them to know Mrs. Churchley.

ADELA: Is there to be nobody else.

COLONEL: Godfrey, of course. A family party. (*Fade out*)

(*Fade in to later that evening; Godfrey's room*)

ADELA: Father is having a dinner party. I suppose that means they will be making their announcement.

GODFREY: (*hesitantly*) I've been to see Mrs. Churchley.

ADELA: What on earth did you do that for?

GODFREY: Father told me he wished it.

ADELA: Then he *has* told you?

GODFREY: Told me what?

ADELA: That they're engaged, of course. What else can all this mean?

GODFREY: He didn't tell me that, but I like her.

ADELA: *Like her?* (*shrieking*)

GODFREY: She's very kind, very good.

ADELA: To thrust herself upon us when we hate her? Is that what you call kind? Is that what you call decent?

GODFREY: I simply don't hate her. (*turns away as though he is bored with her*)

ADELA: I suppose there is something then, that I must do.

GODFREY: And what is that?

ADELA: I must call on Mrs. Churchley and tell her exactly what my feelings are.

GODFREY: Please, Adela, at least wait until father tells you for sure, that they are to be married.

ADELA: (*close up*) (*mildly*) I'll see.

#### SCENE 4

*Adela at Mrs. Churchley's house, waiting to be announced. Close up. She is day-dreaming, visualizing her encounter with Mrs. Churchley. Superimposed on close up is scene between her and Mrs. Churchley. Adela is down on her knees before her.*

ADELA: Oh spare us. Have mercy on us. Let him alone. Go away.

*Camera pans back to reality. Door opens and Adela appears stunned as Mrs. Churchley enters. Adela (looking worried) is about to speak to her. (Fade out, music)*

#### SCENE 5

*Back at the Chart house, Godfrey's study.*

ADELA: What did you say to him?

GODFREY: I said nothing. There was nothing to say.

ADELA: Is that how it strikes you.

GODFREY: He asked me to speak to her.

ADELA: In what hideous sense?

GODFREY: To tell her I was glad.

ADELA: And did you?

GODFREY: I don't know. I said something. She kissed me.

ADELA: (*shuddering*) Oh, how could you. (*covers her face with her hands*)

GODFREY: He says she's very rich.

ADELA: Is that why you kissed her?

GODFREY: (*strongly*) I didn't kiss her. Good night.

#### SCENE 6

*Breakfast room—Colonel's home, Colonel and Adela at table.*

COLONEL: I've a piece of news for you that will probably shock you.  
(*he kisses her*)

ADELA: (*bursts into tears*)

COLONEL: (*hugging her*) Yes, yes, I know, I know.

(*Beatrice and Muriel enter*)

ADELA: (turning to them) Papa's going to be married; he's going to marry Mrs. Churchley.

*Beatrice and Muriel begin crying also; servants come in with tea and boiled eggs. Food gets pushed aside and falls on the floor. The three wailing sisters create a scene of turmoil. Colonel continues to try to quiet them down. Mrs. Flynn attempts to put things back in order.*

COLONEL: Needless to say, I am stunned by your behavior. Mrs. Churchley is the kindest, the most delightful of women; she only wants to make you happy, only wants to make me happy. (Close up of Colonel; his eyes are watery; he is choked up as he speaks) I think it might be best if you girls go away for a while. I shall see about sending you off to Brinton.

*(Close ups of Adela, Muriel, and Beatrice, as they exchange glances)*

## SCENE 7

*Drawing room of Chart home.*

GODFREY: Please tell me this, Adela—what was the purpose of your visit the other morning to Mrs. Churchley?

ADELA: The purpose. What's the matter? Why do you ask?

GODFREY: They've put it off—they've put it off a month.

ADELA: Thank God.

GODFREY: Why the devil do you thank God?

ADELA: You know I think it all wrong.

GODFREY: What did you do there? How did you interfere?

ADELA: Who told you I interfered?

GODFREY: You said something—you did something.

ADELA: What I did was my own business.

GODFREY: Damn your own business. (scowling) You've made a pretty mess. And if I don't pass the exams it will be your fault. (Fade out)

*Camera comes up on Adela in garden with her younger sisters.*

ADELA: (to Beatrice and Muriel) We will be leaving for Brinton tomorrow. Father seems quite miserable. But don't worry darlings, it will be all right. Besides, it will give us a chance to enjoy the summer home that mamma loved so well. (They hug and kiss) (Fade out—music)

SCENE 8

BRINTON: Exterior shot of Brinton (lovely flowers, etc.)

*Godfrey appears in green house where Adela is watering flowers.*

ADELA: I'm so glad you are here—I'm so glad. Will you be staying a few days?

GODFREY: Only till tomorrow morning. They're sending me straight to Madrid.  
I came down to say good-bye.

ADELA: To Madrid? How awfully nice. And it's awfully nice of you to have come.

GODFREY: What I really came for—you might as well know without more delay—is to ask you a question.

ADELA: A question?

GODFREY: (*looks deeply into her eyes*) Yes. What was it you said that morning to Mrs. Churchley?

ADELA: If she has told you, why do you ask?

GODFREY: She has told me nothing. I have seen for myself.

ADELA: What have you seen?

GODFREY: She has broken it off. Everything's over. Father's in the depths.

ADELA: In the depths?

GODFREY: Did you think it would make him jolly?

ADELA: He'll get over it. He'll be glad.

GODFREY: That remains to be seen. You interfered, you invented something; you got round her. I insist on knowing what you did.

ADELA: Are you absolutely certain it's broken off?

GODFREY: He is, and she is; so that's as good.

ADELA: What reason has she given?

GODFREY: None at all—or half a dozen; it's the same thing. She has changed her mind—she mistook her feelings—she can't part with her independence. Moreover, she said that he has too many children.

ADELA: Did he tell you this?

GODFREY: Mrs. Churchley told me. She has gone abroad for a year.

ADELA: And she didn't tell you what I said to her?

GODFREY: Why should I take this trouble if she had?

ADELA: You might have taken it to make me suffer. That appears to be what you want to do.

GODFREY: No, I leave that to *you*—it's the good turn you've done me.  
(*tears in his eyes*)

ADELA: What do you mean? What in the world have I done to you?

GODFREY: She would have helped me. She was all ready to help me.

ADELA: Helped you in what?

GODFREY. Can't you just see I'm in trouble? Where are your eyes, your senses, your sympathy, that you talk so much about? Haven't you seen these six months that I've a curst worry in my life?

ADELA: What's the matter, Godfrey? What *is* the matter?

GODFREY: You've gone against me so—I could strangle you. In God's name, satisfy me. What infernal thing did you do?

ADELA: It wasn't infernal—it was right. I told her mamma had been wretched.

GODFREY: Wretched? You told her such a lie?

ADELA: It was the only way, and she believed me.

GODFREY: Wretched how??—wretched when?—wretched where?

ADELA: I told her papa had made her so, and that *she* ought to know it. I told her the question troubled me unspeakably, but that I had made up my mind it was my duty to initiate her. (*pause*) I notified her that he had faults and peculiarities that made mamma's life a long worry—a martyrdom that she hid wonderfully from the world, but that we saw and that I had often pitied. I told her what they were, these faults and peculiarities; I put the dots on the i's. I said it wasn't fair to let another person marry him with a warning. I warned her; I satisfied my conscience. She could do as she liked. My responsibility was over.

GODFREY: You invented such a tissue of falsities and calumnies, and you talk about your conscience? You stand there in your senses and proclaim your crime?

ADELA: I'd have committed any crime that would have rescued us.

GODFREY: You insult and blacken and ruin your own father?

ADELA: He'll never know it; she took a vow she wouldn't tell him.

GODFREY: Ah, I'll be damned if I won't tell him.

ADELA. I did right—I did right. I went down on my knees to pray for guidance, and I saved mamma's memory from outrage. But if I hadn't, if I hadn't—I'm not worse than you, and I'm not so bad, for you've done something that you're ashamed to tell me.

GODFREY: You raving maniac. (*bounds out of house*)

*Fade out to: Adela in drawing room of Brinton by herself. Miss Flynn appears.*

MISS FLYNN: There is a lady in the drawing room waiting to see you, Adela.

ADELA: Is she big and dreadful?

MISS FLYNN: Well, she's dreadful, but she's not big.

ADELA: *(bewildered)* Well, do show her in, please.

*A rather gaudy young woman with yellow hair, highly-rouged cheeks, and dressed in bright colors, enters. (She speaks with heavy cockney accent). Adela stares coldly at her for a few seconds.*

ADELA: Who are you? What is your business here?

VISITOR: I'll tell you what I've come for. I've come to ask you to intercede.

ADELA: To intercede?

VISITOR: With your father, you know. He doesn't know, but he'll have to. Well, don't look so bewildered. I'll tell you who I am. I'm Mrs. Godfrey, that's who. Yes, your brother's wife. We've been married seven months now. And if he's taken off, then I'm taken off with him. He didn't want to tell his father, so I had to talk to some other member of the family "fice to fice." Being as he was afraid to tell his father himself. I hope you will see to it that the good old colonel does something. Good day. *(she exits)*

*Camera pans in on close-up of Adela. She is dazed. Music, fade out.*

## SCENE 9

*Godfrey appears in garden at Brinton.*

ADELA: Oh Godfrey, Godfrey, is it true?

GODFREY: I've been the most unutterable donkey—you can say what you like to me. You can't say anything worse that I've said to myself.

ADELA: My brother, my brother. What has father said?

GODFREY: *(looking high over her head)* He'll give her six hundred a year.

ADELA: Ah, the angel.

GODFREY: On condition—she never comes near me. She has solemnly promised, and she'll probably leave me alone to get the money. If she doesn't—in diplomacy—I'm lost. I've been living in hell.

ADELA: My brother, my brother.

GODFREY: I'm not an idiot; yet for her I've behaved like one. Don't ask me—

you mustn't know. It was all done in a day, and since then fancy my condition; fancy my work in such a torment; fancy my coming through it all.

ADELA: Thank God you passed. You were wonderful.

GODFREY: I'd have shot myself if I hadn't been. I had an awful day yesterday with the governor; it was late at night before it was over. I leave England next week. He brought me down here for it to look well—so that the children shan't know.

ADELA: He's wonderful too.

GODFREY: Wonderful.

ADELA. Did *she* tell him?

GODFREY: She came straight to Seymour Street from here. She saw him alone first; then he called me in. *That* luxury lasted about an hour.

ADBLA: Poor, poor father.... Have you told him?

GODFREY: Told him what?

ADELA: What you said you would?—what I did.

GODFREY: (*turned away*) I was angry with you, but I cooled off. I held my tongue.

ADELA: (*clapping her hands*) You thought of mamma.

GODFREY: Oh don't speak of mamma.

ADELA: No; if you *had* thought of her.

GODFREY: (*flaring*) Oh then it didn't prevent. I thought Mrs. Churchley good. I believed in her.

ADELA: Is she *very* bad? (*meaning his wife*)

GODFREY: I shall never mention her to you again.

ADELA: You may believe I won't speak of her. So father doesn't know?

GODFREY: Doesn't know what?

ADELA: That I said what I did to Mrs. Churchley?

GODFREY: I don't think so, but you must find out for yourself.

ADELA: I shall find out. But what had Mrs. Churchley to do with it?

GODFREY: With *my* misery? I told her about it. I had to tell someone.

ADELA: Why didn't you tell me?

GODFREY: You? Oh you take things so beastly hard—you make such rows. What I wanted was comfort—not to be lashed up. I thought I should go mad. I wanted Mrs. Churchley to break it to father, to intercede for me and help him to meet it. She was awfully kind to me, she listened and

she understood; she could fancy how it had happened. Without her I shouldn't have pulled through. She liked me, you know; she said she'd do what she could for me. She was full of sympathy and resource. I really leaned on her. But when *you* cut in of course it spoiled everything. That's why I was so furious with you. She couldn't do anything then.

ADELA: So that he had to meet it alone?

GODFREY: Yes, he had to meet it alone. Father is coming here to stay for a while. He says he wants to be with his girls. I suppose that is a good idea. He needs to be away from London. *(Fade out—music)*

*Camera pans in on scenes at Brinton. Colonel Chart is pacing and smoking heavily. Adela watches him. Close up of Adela indicates deep concern for her father.*

ADELA: Father.. *(she begins as though she wants to say something, but then changes her mind)*

COLONEL: Yes, Adela.

ADELA: I just want to say...I mean I should have said something a while ago. I am sorry that...that...you were so dreadfully hurt.

COLONEL: I appreciate your concern my dear, but these things do happen. Fancy that; a woman changes her mind and everyone of my days is dreary.

ADELA: Perhaps we could have some guests in.

COLONEL: My dear girl, what in the world would attract them? No, no. I have decided to do a bit of traveling. I shall start in Paris, and then go on to Monte Carlo. I shall conclude my trip in Madrid to visit with Godfrey. *(He exits. Close up of Adela as she watches after him pitifully) (Music—fade out)*

## SCENE 10

*Overview of London in the spring. Background music is light and airy. Horse-drawn carriages are hurriedly clapping down the streets. Dissolve to a beautifully landscaped park. A year has passed. Adela, Beatrice and Muriel are merrily throwing a ball back and forth. Mrs. Churchley's carriage comes by. She is perched higher than ever. She does not acknowledge Adela and her sisters. Close up of Adela as she watches carriage go by. Cut to:*

*Mrs. Churchley's house. Adela in foyer waiting to be announced. Servant announces her and she enters drawing room where Mrs. Churchley is standing, ready to receive her.*

MRS. CHURCHLEY: *(coldly)* Well, you have come to visit?

ADELA: *(she stares at Mrs. Churchley for a moment and then blurts out her thoughts)* Yes, I...I am deeply sorry for the pain I must have caused you.

Everything I told you was false. Please regard it as unsaid. Please forgive me. Please do not despise me too much. Take pity on my dear, sweet, perfect papa. Please, please, come back to him. He has been miserable without you.

MRS. CHURCHLEY: (*laughing extravagantly*) Oh, this is all too hilarious. (*laughing more*) Why I never believed what you said for one minute. It was all too absurd. I really disliked you and I found you utterly false. I told your father what a horrid girl you were and I told him that I could never live with anyone so horrid. I told him that you must be sent away, for you would never marry. I really loathed what you had done, but your father defended you for me. This, of course, led to the complete rupture of our relationship.

ADELA: Papa gave you up for me. Fancy the angel. Fancy what I must try to be to him for the rest of his life. Oh Mrs. Churchley, I beg of you. Please, please come back to him. His life is meaningless without you.

MRS. CHURCHLEY: (*close up*) (*frivolously*) I'm afraid it's too late. You see, I am going to marry Lord Dovedale next month.

*MUSIC-CREDITS*



# **THE FURNISHED ROOM**

By

O. Henry (William Sydney Porter)

Adapted for Television by Helaine Michaels Klein

# THE FURNISHED ROOM

## CHARACTERS

NARRATOR (MALE)  
YOUNG MAN  
BARTENDER  
MRS. PURDY  
MRS. MCCOOL

*Overview of the lower west side of New York City at the turn of the century (1900). We see some people strolling along the street carrying various varieties of baggage.*

*Music—"Home Sweet Home" in ragtime.*

NARRATOR: Restless, shifting, fugacious as time itself is a certain vast bulk of the population of the red brick district of the lower west side. Homeless, they have a hundred homes. They flit from furnished room to furnished room, transients forever—transients in abode, transients in heart and mind. They carry their lares et penates in a bandbox; their vine is entwined about a picture hat; a rubber plant is their fig tree.

*Camera pans row of red brick houses.*

Hence the houses of this district, having had a thousand dwellers, should have a thousand tales to tell, mostly dull ones, no doubt; but it would be strange if there could not be found a ghost or two in the wake of all these vagrant guests.

*Camera pans in on young man with suitcase as he stands on doorstep of one of the houses. He wipes the dust from his hat-band and forehead and rings doorbell. Housekeeper (Mrs. Purdy) answers.*

MRS. PURDY: Good afternoon. And what can I do for you young man?

YOUNG MAN: Is there a room to let?

MRS. PURDY: Yes. Come in. *(He enters house. Camera pans in on foyer of house)* I have the third floor back, vacant since a week back. Should you wish to look at it.

YOUNG MAN: Oh yes, for sure. *(He follows her up the stairs. They pass vacant niches in the walls where plants had once been set. The stairwell is dark and dreary)*

MRS. PURDY: *(she opens the door to room)* This is the room. It's a nice room. It isn't often vacant. I had some most elegant people in it last summer—no trouble at all, and paid in advance to the minute. The water's at the end of the hall. Sprowls and Mooney kept it three months. They done a vaude-

ville sketch. Miss B’retta Sprowls—you may have heard of her—right there over the dresser is where the marriage certificate hung, framed. The gas is here, and you see there is plenty of closet room. It’s a room everybody likes. It never stays idle long.

YOUNG MAN: Do you have many theatrical people rooming here?

MRS. PURDY: They comes and goes. A good proportion of my lodgers is connected with the theaters. Yes, sir, this is the theatrical district. Actor people never stays long anywhere. I get my share. Yes, they comes and they goes.

YOUNG MAN: Okay, I’ll take it. And since I’m kind of tired, I’ll move right in now. How much do I owe you?

MRS. PURDY: That’ll be two and fifty for the upcomin’ week. *(He counts out money and hands it to her)* The room is ready, even to towels and water.

YOUNG MAN: Can you tell me something before you go? A young girl— Miss Vashner—Miss Eloise Vashner—do you remember such a one among your lodgers? She would be singing on the stage, most likely. A fair girl, of medium height and slender, with reddish, gold hair, and a dark mole near her left eyebrow.

MRS. PURDY: No, I don’t remember the name. Them stage people has names they change as often as their rooms. They comes and they goes. No, I don’t call that one to mind. *(she exits down stairs)*

YOUNG MAN: *(close up; we hear his thoughts)* No, Always no. Five months of ceaseless interrogation and the inevitable negative. So much time spent by day in questioning managers, agents, schools, and choruses; by night among the audiences of theaters from all-star casts down to music halls so low that I dread to find what I most hope for. Where can you be? Sure but I love you so much. Where ever can you be, my darling?

*Overhead shot of young man slouching in chair. He is a small figure among the debris and clutter of the room.*

NARRATOR: The young man was sure that since her disappearance from home this great, water-girt city held her somewhere, but it was like a monstrous quicksand, shifting its particles constantly, with no foundation, its upper granules of today buried tomorrow in ooze and slime. The furnished room received its latest guest with a first glow of pseudo-hospitality, a hectic, haggard, perfunctory welcome.

*Camera pans room—decayed furniture, a ragged brocade couch and two chairs, gilt picture frames, brass bedstead in a comer, a soiled polychromatic rug with soiled matting, and gay-papered walls. Pictures on wall are “The Huguenot Lovers,” “The First Quarrel,” “The Wedding Breakfast,” and “Psyche at the Fountain.” Back to close up of young man as he listens to sounds heard in the house—a tittering and incontinent, slack laughter; the monologue of a scold; the rattling of dice; a lullaby; a baby cry-*

*ing, a banjo; doors banging; elevated trains roaring; a cat yowling miserably upon a back fence. He breathes the breath of the house—a dank savor rather than a smell—a cold, musty effluvium. He suddenly smells the room filled with the strong, sweet odor of mignonette. He cries out:*

YOUNG MAN: What, dear? *(he reaches out)* She's been in this room. She has. I know it. *(he begins to ransack the room, looking for clues left behind or traces of the girl)*

She's been in this room. I know she's been here. That fragrance, that odor. I know it. I know it. It's her mignonette. She loved that odor...made it herself.

*(He continues searching room. Camera follows him as he pulls open all the drawers, looks in closets, under furniture, etc. Close up of his hand as he discovers a half dozen hairpins. In one of the drawers he finds a tiny ragged handkerchief. He presses it to his face. In another drawer he finds odd buttons, a theater program, a pawnbroker's card, two lost marshmallows, a book on the divination of dreams. In the last drawer he finds a woman's black satin bow. Close up of bow as music comes up. Cut.)*

## SCENE 2

*A neighborhood bar somewhere on the west side. Camera comes in on young man as he is having a conversation with the bartender.*

BARTENDER: But for sure, how can you be certain she was in that room.

YOUNG MAN: I'm sure of it. I smelled her mignonette as though she had just been there five minutes before. I also found these hairpins. It seemed she wore a million of these in her hair, to hold it up, you know.

BARTENDER: But why wouldn't the landlady have remembered.

YOUNG MAN: You got me there fellow. But as she said, these theatrical people come and go so fast. I suppose it's possible to just not remember. *(close up)* It's so strange, you know. But when I smelled that odor, I heard her voice calling me. I tried to answer, but I couldn't. But she just kept a callin' and a callin'. *(close up of bartender looking doubtfully at young man)*

*Dissolve to: Young man walking the streets of the west side, examining all the passers-by. He follows a young girl for about two minutes. The young girl faces him and turns out to be a stranger he has never seen before. Another close up of young man looking disappointed.*

*Dissolve to: Room in rooming house. Young man sitting in chair deep in thought. We hear the ethereal sound of a female voice. Although the words are indistinguishable, they vaguely sound like "Come back to me."*

YOUNG MAN: What dear? Are you speaking to me? Oh where are you? Oh am I to be going mad? I must find her.

*He begins ransacking room once again. This time he searches inside mantlepice, window crevices, and tables. He skims the walls, looks under rug, under the matting of the rug, pulls down curtains, and checks window sills. He looks in every conceivable spot for a trace of his beloved's presence.*

YOUNG MAN: I know she has been in this room. Dammit, she has.

*Behind one of the crevices he finds a half-smoked cigar. He throws it down. Close up of his foot as he grinds it beneath his heel. Fade out.*

### SCENE 3

*Camera pans in on front view of rooming house. Out to shot of interior of furnished room. We see young man sitting amidst the clutter.*

NARRATOR: Our young man, in desperation to find his beloved, has burrowed in crevices and comers. He has found corks, cigarettes, and half-smoked cigars. He has found dreary and ignoble small records of many a peripatetic tenant; but of her whom he sought, and who may have lodged there, and whose spirit seemed to hover there, he found no trace. *(close up of young man)* But the young man has not yet given up hope; he will prevail upon the mistress of this decaying abode once again.

*Camera follows young man as he runs from his room down the creaky old staircase to the landlady's door which shows a crack of light at the bottom. Close up of door—his hand knocking. Mrs. Purdy answers door.*

YOUNG MAN: Will you tell me, madam, who occupied the room I have before I came?

MRS. PURDY: Yes, sir. I can tell you again. 'Twas Sprowls and Mooney, as I said. Miss B'retta Sprowls it was in the theaters, but Missis Mooney she was. My house is well known for respectability. The marriage certificate hung, framed, on a nail over—

YOUNG MAN: What kind of a lady was Miss Sprowls—in looks, I mean?

MRS. PURDY: Why, black-haired, sir, short, and stout, with a comical face. They left a week ago Tuesday.

YOUNG MAN: And before they occupied it?

MRS. PURDY: Why, there was a single gentleman connected with the draying business. He left owing me a week. Before him was Missis Crowder and her two children, that stayed four months. That goes back a year, sir, and further I do not remember.

YOUNG MAN: *(dejected)* Thank you.

*Camera follows young man slowly climbing the staircase.*

NARRATOR: And so the young man crept back to his room. But the room was dead. The essence that had vivified it was gone. The perfume of mignonette had departed. In its place was the old, stale odor of moldy house furniture, of atmosphere in storage. The ebbing of his hope drained his faith.

*Camera follows young man as he walks to bed and begins to tear the sheets into strips. With the blade of his knife he drives them tightly into every crevice around windows and door. He turns out light, turns the gas on full again, and lays himself upon the bed.*

*MUSIC—Fade out*

#### SCENE 4

*Mrs. Purdy's apartment. Mrs. McCool, another housekeeper, has brought in cans of beer. The two women are drinking and chatting.<sup>1</sup>*

MRS. PURDY: I rented out my third floor back this evening. A young man took it. He went up to bed two hours ago.

MRS. MCCOOL: Now, did ye, Mrs. Purdy, Ma'am? You do a wonder for rentin' rooms of that kind. And did ye tell him, then?

MRS. PURDY: Rooms are furnished for to rent. I did not tell him, Mrs. McCool.

MRS. MCCOOL: 'Tis right ye are, ma'am; 'tis by renting rooms we kape alive. Ye have the rale sense for business, ma'am. There be many people will rayject the rentin' of a room if they be tould a suicide has been after dyin' in the bed of it.

MRS. PURDY: As you say, we has our living to be making.

MRS. MCCOOL: Yis, ma'am; 'tis true. 'Tis just one wake ago this day I helped ye lay out the third floor, back. A pretty slip of a colleen she was to be killin' herself wid the gas—a swate little face she had, Mrs. Purdy, ma'am.

MRS. PURDY: She'd a-been called handsome, as you say, but for that mole she had a growin' by her left eyebrow. Do fill up your glass again, Mrs. McCool.

*Dissolve to: Closed door of furnished room on third floor.*

*MUSIC—CREDITS*

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<sup>1</sup>Many Irish immigrants and first-generation Irish-Americans settled on the lower west side of New York City during this period. They spoke with lilting Irish brogues. The young man is American-bom and the two landladies are Ireland-born as their brogue is much more pronounced. O. Henry chose to write their dialogue phonetically.

# **THE DEVIL AND TOM WALKER**

By  
Washington Irving

Adapted for radio by Helaine Michaels-Klein

# THE DEVIL AND TOM WALKER

## CHARACTERS

TOM WALKER

MRS. WALKER

OLD SCRATCH

LAND-JOBBER

*MUSIC—Fade in—Fade out*

*TOM WALKER:* Tom Walker's the name. You folks probably heard of me at one time or another. In fact, there's a popular saying in New England, a kind of proverb; you've heard it, "The Devil and Tom Walker." That was me all right. It's not a very pretty story, but one I like to tell. And to all you who may be listening, I'll tell you one thing; it's a story you can learn from.

About the year 1727, just at the time that earthquakes were prevalent in New England, (*sound effect—strong howling winds*) and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees, we lived. I was a real miserly fellow and my wife was just as miserly. We even conspired to cheat each other, if you can believe that. Whatever that woman could lay hands on, she hid away; a hen could not cackle but she was on the alert to secure the new-laid egg.

*MRS. WALKER:* Tom, I heard that hen. What did you do with the egg? Where is it Tom? Tom? Tom? (*screeching*) Tom, did you hear me?

I was continually prying about to detect her secret hoards, and many and fierce were the conflicts that took place about what ought to have been common property. We lived in a forlorn-looking house that stood alone, and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin-trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveller stopped at its door.

There was a deep inlet, winding several miles into the interior of the country from Charles Bay, and terminating in a thickly-wooded swamp or morass. On one side of this inlet was a beautiful dark grove; on the opposite side the land rises abruptly from the water's edge into a high ridge, on which grew a few scattered oaks of great age and immense size. Under one of these gigantic trees, according to old stories, there was a great amount of treasure buried by Kidd the pirate. He was also known as William Kidd. You may have heard of him. He was tried and convicted for murder and piracy and hanged in London in 1701. Well, anyway, the inlet allowed a facility to bring the money in a boat secretly and at night to the very foot of the hill; the elevation of the place permitted a good lookout to be kept that no one was at hand; while the

remarkable trees formed good landmarks by which the place might easily be found again. The old stories add, moreover, that the devil presided at the hiding of the money, and took it under his guardianship; but this, it is well known, he always does with buried treasure, particularly when it has been ill-gotten. Be that as it may, Kidd never returned to recover his wealth.

*Brief musical interlude*

My wife and I had a bad name in the community. She was a tall skinny woman, fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with me and sometimes she even gave me a wallop or two. No one ventured however to interfere between us. I shrunk within myself at the horrid clamor and clapper-clawing; eyed the den of discord askance; and hurried on my way, rejoicing, as if a bachelor, in my celibacy. One day I went to a distant part of the neighborhood and took a short cut through the swamp. Like most short cuts, it was an ill-chosen route. The swamp was thickly grown with great gloomy pines and hemlocks, some of them ninety feet high, which made it dark at noonday. It was a retreat for owls of the neighborhood. It was full of pits and quagmires, partly covered with weeds and mosses, where the green surface often betrayed the traveller into a gulf of black, smothering mud; there were also dark and stagnant pools, the abodes of the tadpole, the bull frog, and the water-snake; where the trunks of pines and hemlocks lay half-drowned, half-rotting, looking like alligators sleeping in the mire.

I had long been picking my way cautiously through this treacherous forest; stepping from tuft to tuft of rushes and roots, which afforded precarious footholds among deep sloughs; or pacing carefully, like a cat, along the prostrate trunks of trees; startled now and then by the sudden screaming of the bittern, or the quacking of a wild duck rising on the wing from some solitary pool. At length I arrived at a firm piece of ground, which ran out like a peninsula into the deep bosom of the swamp. It had been one of the strongholds of the Indians during their wars with the first colonists. Here they had thrown up a kind of fort, which they had looked upon as almost impregnable, and had used as a place of refuge for their squaws and children. Nothing remained of the old Indian fort but a few embankments, gradually shrinking to the level of the surrounding earth, and already overgrown in part by oaks and other forest trees, the foliage of which formed a contrast to the dark pines and hemlocks of the swamp.

*Brief musical interlude*

It was late in the dusk of evening when I reached the old fort, and I paused awhile to rest myself. It was scary as hell but I wasn't a man with fears of any kind. I reposed myself for some time on the trunk of a fallen hemlock, listening to the boding cry of the treetoad. (*sound effect*) I delved with my walking-staff into a mound of black mould at my feet. As I turned up the soil unconsciously, my staff struck against something hard. I raked it out of the

vegetable mould, and lo, a cloven skull, with an Indian tomahawk buried deep in it, lay before me. The rust on the weapon showed the time that had elapsed since this deathblow had been given.

TOM: Humph, I'll just give it a little kick to shake off the dirt.

*Thunderous music*

OLD SCRATCH: (*gruff voice*) Let that skull alone.

TOM: I lifted my eyes and beheld a great black man seated directly opposite me on the stump of a tree. This stranger was neither Negro nor Indian. He was dressed in a rude half-Indian garb, and had a red belt or sash swathed round his body; but his face was neither black or copper-color, but swarthy and dingy and begrimed with soot, as if he had been accustomed to toil among fires and forges. He had a shock of coarse black hair, that stood out from his head in all directions and he bore an axe on his shoulder. He scowled at me for a moment with a pair of great red eyes.

OLD SCRATCH: What are you doing on my grounds?

TOM: Your grounds? (*sneering*) No more your grounds than mine; they belong to Deacon Peabody.

OLD SCRATCH: Deacon Peabody be damned, as I flatter myself he will be, if he does not look more to his own sins and less to those of his neighbors. Look younder, and see how Deacon Peabody is faring.

TOM: I looked in the direction that the stranger pointed, and beheld one of the great trees, fair and flourishing without, but rotten at the core, and saw that it had been nearly hewn through, so that the first high wind was likely to blow it down. On the bark of the tree was scored the name of Deacon Peabody, an eminent man, who had waxed wealthy by driving shrewd bargains with the Indians. I looked around some more and found most of the tall trees marked with the name of some great man of the colony, and all more or less scored by the axe. The one on which he had been seated, and which had evidently just been hewn down, bore the name of Crowninshield; and I remembered a mighty rich man of that name, who made a vulgar display of wealth, which it was whispered he had acquired by buccaneering.

OLD SCRATCH: He's just ready for burning. You see I am likely to have a good stock of firewood for winter.

TOM: But what right have you, to cut down Deacon Peabody's timber?

OLD SCRATCH: The right of a prior claim. This woodland belonged to me long before one of your white-faced race put foot upon the soil.

TOM: And pray, who are you, if I may be so bold?

OLD SCRATCH: Oh, I go by various names. I am the wild huntsman in some countries; the black miner in others. In this neighborhood I am known by the name of the black woodsman. I am he to whom the red men consecrated this spot, and in honor of whom they now and then roasted a white man,

by way of sweet-smelling sacrifice. Since the red men have been exterminated by you white savages, I amuse myself by presiding at the persecutions of Quakers and Anabaptists, I am the great patron and prompter of slave-dealers, and the grand-master of the Salem witches.

*TOM:* The upshot of all which is, that, if I mistake not, you are he commonly called Old Scratch.

*OLD SCRATCH:* The same, at your service.

*TOM:* Well, since I am such a hard-minded fellow, not easily daunted, my nerves weren't shaken too much by meeting this stranger in such a dark, lonely, place. Besides after living so long with such a miserable wife, I didn't even fear the devil. Anyway, Old Scratch and I started to have a real serious, earnest conversation.

*OLD SCRATCH:* Let me tell you something my good fellow. There are great sums of money buried by Kidd, the pirate, under the oak trees on the high ridge, not far from the morass. All these are under my command and protected by my power, so none could find them but such who propitiate my favor. Since you are a likable fellow, I will place these treasures within your reach, but only under certain conditions.

*TOM:* Well, I never discussed what these conditions were publicly, but you all being an intelligent audience can easily surmise what they were. After all, I'm not a man to stick to trifles when money is in view.

*TOM:* What proof have I that all you have been telling me is true?

*OLD SCRATCH:* There's my signature.

*TOM:* He placed his finger on my forehead. So doing, he turned off among the tickets of the swamp, and seemed to go down, down, down, into the earth, until nothing but his head and shoulders could be seen, and so on, until he totally disappeared. When I reached home, I found the black print of a finger burnt into my forehead which nothing could obliterate. My wife greeted me with a bit of news.

*MRS. WALKER:* Tom, Absalom Crowninshield, the rich buccaneer, died suddenly. It was announced in the papers.

*TOM:* So... let the freebooter roast, who cares.

*TOM:* I really didn't want to tell her the events of the day. I mean I rarely let this woman into my confidence, but this was an uneasy secret, so I shared it with her. Naturally, all her avarice was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged me to comply with the black man's terms, and secure what would make us wealthy for life.

*MRS. WALKER:* Tom, are you a crazy man? You idiot, of course you're going to do it. Think of all that gold. Damn it man, you're going to do it.

*TOM:* Don't you tell me what to do woman. I ain't selling myself to the devil, especially not to please you, you old wench!

Many and bitter were the quarrels we had after that, but the more she talked, the more resolute was I not to be damned to please her. At length she determined to drive the bargain on her own account, and if she succeeded, to keep all the gain to herself. Being of the same fearless temper as myself, she set off for the old Indian fort towards the close of a summer's day. She was many hours absent. When she came back, she was reserved and sullen in her replies.

MRS. WALKER: Tom, there was this black man who was hewing at the root of a tall tree. He was sulky and would not come to terms. I told him I would come back again with another offering.

TOM: The next evening she set off again for the swamp, with her apron heavily laden. I waited and waited for her, but in vain; midnight came, but she did not make her appearance; morning, noon, night returned, but still she did not come. I now grew uneasy for her safety, especially since I knew she had the silver teapot and spoons, and other valuables in her apron. Another night elapsed, another morning came; but no wife. In a word, she was never heard of more. What was her real fate nobody knows, in consequence of so many pretending to know. It's one of those facts which have become confounded by a variety of historians. Some asserted that she lost her way among the tangled mazes of the swamp, and sank into some pit or slough; others, more uncharitable, hinted that she had eloped with the household money, and made off to some other province; while others surmised that the tempter had decoyed her into a dismal quagmire, on the top of which her hat was found lying. In confirmation of this, it was said a great black man, with an axe on his shoulder, was seen late that very evening coming out of the swamp, carrying a bundle tied in a check apron, with an air of surly triumph. However, I'll tell you the truth. This is what happened. I grew pretty anxious about the fate of my wife and property so I set out at length to seek them both at the Indian fort. During a long summer's afternoon, I searched about the gloomy place, but no wife was to be seen. I called her name repeatedly, but she was nowhere to be heard. At length, just in the brown hour of twilight, when the owls begin to hoot, and the bats to flit about, my attention was attracted by the clamor of carrion crows hovering about a cypress-tree. I looked up, and beheld a bundle tied in a check apron, and hanging in the branches of the tree, was a great vulture perched hard by, as if keeping watch upon it. I leaped for joy; I recognized her apron, and supposed it to contain the household valuables. Let me get hold of the property, I thought, and I will endeavor to do without this woman. I scrambled up the tree and the vulture spread its wide wings and sailed off. I seized the apron, but woeful sight, found nothing but a heart and liver tied up in it. That was all to be found of my wife. She had probably attempted to deal with the black man as she had been accustomed to dealing with me. But though a female scold is generally considered a match for the devil, in this instance she appears to have had the worse of it.

She must have died game, however, for I noticed many prints of cloven feet deeply stamped about the tree and I found handfuls of hair that looked as if they had been plucked from the coarse black shock of the black man. Egad, Old Scratch must have had a tough time of it. Well, I consoled myself for the loss of my property and the loss of my wife. After all, I am a man of fortitude. I even felt something like gratitude towards the black man. He had really done me a kindness. So I sought out a further acquaintance with him.

TOM: Hello, Old Scratch, I'm back. I thought we might discuss our business dealings a bit further.

OLD SCRATCH: *(does not respond; goes on with his business)*

TOM: Old Scratch, can you tell me, how can I get at the pirate's treasure?

OLD SCRATCH: Well I'll tell you Tom. I've been thinking and I think any money found through my means should be employed in my service. How about employing it to fit out a slave-ship?

TOM: Forget it. The devil himself could not tempt me to turn slave-trader.

OLD SCRATCH: All right then, how about becoming a usurer. You shall open a broker's shop in Boston next month.

TOM: That sounds fine to me. I'll do it tomorrow, if you wish.

OLD SCRATCH: You shall lend money at two percent a month.

TOM: Egad, I'll charge four.

OLD SCRATCH: You shall extort bonds, foreclose mortgages, drive the merchants to bankruptcy.

TOM: I'll drive them to the devil.

OLD SCRATCH: You are the usurer for my money. When will you want the cash?

TOM: This very night.

OLD SCRATCH: Done!

TOM: Done!

*TOM:* So, we shook hands and struck a bargain and a few days later there I was, Tom Walker, seated behind my desk in a counting-house in Boston. My reputation for a ready-moneyed man, who would lend money out for a good consideration, soon spread abroad. Everybody remembers the time of Governor Belcher, when money was particularly scarce. It was a time of paper credit. The country had been deluged with government bills, the famous Land Bank had been established; there had been a rage for speculating; the people had run mad with schemes for new settlements; for building cities in the wilderness; land-jobbers went about with maps of grants, and townships, and Eldorados, lying nobody knew where, but which everybody was ready to purchase. In a word, the great speculating

fever which breaks out every now and then in the country, had raged to an alarming degree, and everybody was dreaming of making sudden fortunes from nothing. As usual the fever had subsided; the dream had gone off, and the imaginary fortunes with it; the patients were left in doleful plight, and the whole country resounded with the consequent cry of “hard times.” At this propitious time of public distress did I set up as usurer in Boston. My door was soon thronged by customers. The needy and adventurous; the gambling speculator; the dreaming land-jobber; the thriftless tradesman; the merchant with cracked credit; in short, everyone driven to raise money by desperate means and desperate sacrifices, hurried to me. Thus I was the universal friend of the needy, and acted like a “friend in need”; that is to say, I always exacted good pay and good security. In proportion to the distress of the applicant was the highness of my terms. I accumulated bonds and mortgages; gradually squeezed my customers closer and closer: and sent them at length, dry as a sponge, from my door.

In this way I made money hand over hand; became a rich and mighty man. I built myself a vast house, out of ostentation; but left the greater part of it unfinished and unfurnished, out of parsimony. I even set up a carriage in the fulness of my vainglory, though I nearly starved the horses which drew it; and as the ungreased wheels groaned and screeched on the axle-trees, you would have thought you heard the souls of the poor debtors I was squeezing.

As I waxed old, however, I grew thoughtful. Having secured the good things of this world, I began to feel anxious about those of the next. I thought with regret of the bargain I had made with my black friend, and set my wits to work to cheat him out of the conditions. I became, therefore, all of a sudden, a violent church-goer.

*(Sound effect: Church bells; church choir humming—Tom’s voice in distance: “Our father who art in heaven...”)*

I prayed loudly and strenuously, as if heaven were to be taken by force of lungs. Indeed, one might always tell when I had sinned most during the week, by the clamor of my Sunday devotion. Still, in spite of all this strenuous attention to forms, I had a lurking dread that the devil, after all, would have his due. That he might not be taken unawares, therefore, I always carried a small Bible in my coat-pocket. I had also a great folio Bible on my counting-house desk, and would frequently be found reading it when people called on business; on such occasions I would lay my green spectacles in the book, to mark the place, while I turned round to drive some usurious bargain. I grew a little crack-brained in my old days.

One hot summer afternoon in the dogdays, just as a terrible black thunder-gust was coming up, I sat in my counting-house, in my white linen cap and India silk morning-gown. I was on the point of foreclosing a mortgage, by which I would complete the ruin of an unlucky land-speculator for whom I had

professed the greatest friendship. The poor land-jobber begged me to grant a few months' indulgence. I had grown testy and irritated, and refused another day.

*Sound effects: Door opening and closing*

LAND-JOBBER: My family will be ruined and brought upon the parish.

TOM: Charity begins at home. I must take care of myself in these hard times.

LAND-JOBBER: You have made so much money out of me.

TOM: The devil take me, if I have made a farthing.

*TOM:* Just then there were three loud knocks at the street-door. (*Sound effect—3 loud knocks*) I stepped out to see who was there. A black man was holding a black horse, which neighed and stamped with impatience.

*Sound effect—Horse neighing*

OLD SCRATCH: Tom, you're come for.

*TOM:* I shrank back, but too late. I had left my little Bible at the bottom of my coat pocket, and my big Bible on the desk buried under the mortgage I was about to foreclose; never was sinner taken more unawares. The black man whisked me like a child into the saddle, gave the horse the lash, and away he galloped, with me on his back, in the midst of the thunder-storm. Away we went dashing down the streets; my white cap bobbing up and down; my morning-gown fluttering in the wind, and my steed striking fire out of the pavement at every bound. The black man had disappeared.

I never returned to foreclose the mortgage. A countryman, who lived on the border of the swamp, reported that in the height of the thunder-gust he had heard a great clattering of hoofs and a howling along the road, and running to the window caught sight of a figure, such as I have described, on a horse that galloped like mad across the fields, over the hills, and down into the black hemlock swamp towards the old Indian fort; and that shortly after a thunder-bolt falling in that direction seemed to set the whole forest in a blaze.

The good people of Boston shook their heads and shrugged their shoulders, but had been so much accustomed to witches and goblins, and tricks of the devil, in all kinds of shapes, from the first settlement of the colony, that they were not so much horror-struck as might have been expected. Trustees were appointed to take charge of my effects. There was nothing, however, to administer. On searching my coffers, all my bonds and mortgages were found reduced to cinders. In place of gold and silver, the iron chest was filled with chips and shavings; two skeletons lay in my stable instead of my half-starved horses, and the very next day my great house took fire and was burnt to the ground.

*MUSIC—UP GRADUALLY*

Such was the end of yours truly and my ill-gotten wealth. Let all griping money-brokers lay this story to heart. The truth of it is not to be doubted. The very hole under the oak-trees, whence I dug Kidd's money, is to be seen to this day; and in case you are all wondering what state I'm in now and from where I speak, I can only tell you that on many a stormy night the people up here can see a figure in morning-gown and white cap riding through the streets on horseback. That is the troubled spirit, they say, of Tom Walker.

*MUSIC—CREDITS*



# THE BLACK CAT

By  
Edgar Allan Poe

Adapted for radio by Helaine Michaels Klein

# THE BLACK CAT

## CHARACTERS

ANNOUNCER

IGNATIUS GROPEE (NARRATOR)

MRS. GROPER

LANDLORD

1ST POLICE OFFICER

2ND POLICE OFFICER

THREE PEOPLE IN CROWD

ANNOUNCER: Edgar Allan Poe showed, in his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, that he had a deep knowledge of the inner man, especially of the darker side of human nature. “The Black Cat,” one of the stories in that collection, and the one that we are about to hear, illustrates how the evil forces within one man, Ignatius Groper, came to prevail completely over his conscience.

*MUSIC—up and under*

IGNATIUS GROPER: From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own.

MRS. GROPER: Dearest, come my love, I have a surprise for you.

MR. GROPER: Oh, you’re too good to me. What is it today?

MRS. GROPER: Today... today darling, it’s a cat... a beautiful cat.

MR. GROPER: But sweetheart, we already have birds, a goldfish, a fine dog, rabbits, and a monkey.

MRS. GROPER: But he’s so beautiful—and intelligent too.

MR. GROPER: Yes, he does have a fine coat of black fur and he’s so huge.

MRS. GROPER: What shall we name him?

MR. GROPER: Hmmmm... how about Pluto?

MRS. GROPER: Oh dear, that is a bit morbid. Wasn't he the God of the dead?

MR. GROPER: Well, my dear, that is, after all, fitting. He is all black, representative of darkness or death.

MRS. GROPER: Oh, all right. Since it is the first name come to mind. Pluto he shall be.

Pluto was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

MR. GROPER: Pluto, stop cavorting after me. Go home.

PLUTO: Meow

MR. GROPER: Do you hear me? Turn around and go home.

PLUTO: Meow

MR. GROPER: All right then. Come along. What difference does it make? No one will notice you.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character—through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance, alcohol,—had experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others.

MR. GROPER: (*growling*) Where are my slippers? Where did you put my slippers, you wench?

MRS. GROPER: Did you look under the bed?

MR. GROPER: What would they be doing under the bed? Why can't they be where I left them. Come here you miserable, ugly, disgusting, beastly woman... take that. (*he strikes her*)

MRS. GROPER: (*crying out*) Oh. Oh. Help, help, someone, he's going to kill me. (*screaming*) Help!

MR. GROPER: Shut up, you bloody fiend. They'll hear you in the next town.

My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition also. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when, by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him:

MR. GROPER: Come here you beast, I'll show you who's boss. Take that you fiend, *(cat screeches)* You see this little penknife—small, but sharp, sharp enough to take out your bloody eye. Come closer beast. There! *(cat screams)* There you monster. You won't be peering at me so much anymore.

I blush, I burn, I shudder, when I think of that. When reason returned with the morning—when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch—I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. One morning, in cold blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart;—hung it because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason of offence;—hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this most cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire.

*(Sound effect—blazing fire)*

MRS. GROPER: Ignatius, oh Ignatius, look the curtains are on fire.

MR. GROPER: The curtains. You dumb woman, it's not just the curtains. The entire house is on fire. We've got to get out of here, follow me. Hurry, down these steps. Come on, come on. A little farther, a little more. There now, we're out... safe.

MRS. GROPER: *(crying)* Oh the house. Look—there won't be anything left. How horrible; we've lost all our worldly possessions. What will we do?

MR. GROPER: Our entire wealth swallowed up. Soon after that conflagration, I resigned myself to a lifetime of despair.

On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire—a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected:

VOICE NO. 1: Look at that, isn't it strange.

VOICE NO. 2: Singular.

VOICE NO. 3: How unusual.

Many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. I approached and saw, as if graven in basrelief upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic cat. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous. There was a rope about the animal's neck. When I first beheld this apparition—for I could scarcely regard it as less—my wonder and my terror were extreme.

We quickly found shelter in a small, humble apartment, not too far from where our house had stood. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

One night as I sat, half stupefied, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of gin, or of rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand.

MR. GROPER: Do my eyes deceive me? But the resemblance is uncanny. You must be Pluto. But how can you be? Come closer, (*meow sound*) Oh but there is a difference. Pluto was completely black. You, you monster, your entire breast is white. Here, allow me to pet you. (*strong purring sound*) Why you seem to be quite fond of me? How would you like to come home with me? Oh, there's the landlord. Do you belong to him? I shall ask. Excuse me, but does this animal belong to you?

LANDLORD: No, I've never seen the beast before in my life.

MR. GROPER: I was going to offer to purchase him, but if you have no claim to him, I shall just take him home.

LANDLORD: Suit yourself.

When I prepared to go home, the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife.

MRS. GROPER: Oh, where did you find him? He's absolutely lovely, (*purring sound*) (*laughing*) How wonderful, he likes me too!

I discovered on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps everywhere. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly—let me confess it at once—by absolute dread of the beast.

MRS. GROPER: It really is amazing. The only difference between this charming cat and Pluto is his shock of white hair. Otherwise, they are absolutely identical in every way.

MR. GROPER: Yes, isn't it interesting indeed? You know, the white outline seems to be taking shape. It is starting to look like something.

I shudder to name what it was beginning to resemble. It was now the representation of, the image of a hideous, ghastly thing—of the Gallows! Alas! Neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of rest any more. During the former the creature left me no moment alone, and in the latter I started hourly from dreams of unutterable fear to find the hot breath of the thing upon my face, and its vast weight—an incarnate nightmare that I had no power to shake off—incumbent eternally upon my heart.

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thought became my sole intimates—the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas, was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers.

One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness.

MR. GROPER: Get out of my way, you fiend. Let me get this axe right over here. Let me at that fiend.

MRS. GROPER: No, don't you dare. Give me that axe. Don't you dare hurt him.

MR. GROPER: Get out of my way woman, or, or, I'll let you have it too.

MRS. GROPER: Give me that axe. Give me (*he strikes her on the head*) give ...give...(*she slumps down the stairs to her death*)

The hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well in the yard—packing it in a box, as if merchandise, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar, as the monks of the Middle Ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I had no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect any thing suspicious.

And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crowbar I easily dislodged the bricks, and having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that position, while with little trouble I relaid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brickwork. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly. Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain. I, then, looked around for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness, but I could not find him anywhere. I was relieved not to find him and that night I slept very soundly even with the burden of murder upon my soul. Three days passed and once again I breathed as a free man. Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came, very unexpectedly, into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises.

POLICE OFFICER: Mr. Groper, would you mind assisting us in our search? After all, you know the house so well.

MR. GROPER: No trouble at all officer. But I have been searching and I am almost resigned to the fact that I shall never see my beloved dearest again. She just disappeared, it seems, into thin air.

2ND POLICE OFFICER: Let's go down into the cellar, if you will permit us.

MR. GROPER: Of course. This way—follow me. (*sound effects—footsteps descending cellar steps.*)

POLICE OFFICER: (*knocking on walls*) Well, it isn't very big down here. Certainly doesn't look as though there's anything suspicious.

MR. GROPER: Gentlemen, I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all good health.

POLICE OFFICER: Mr. Groper, if you don't mind my inquiring, of what material is this house constructed? It appears to be very solid.

MR. GROPER: Officer, you are correct indeed. This is a very well-constructed house, I may say an excellently well-constructed house. These walls are solidly put together. (*raps on walls with a cane*)

MRS. GROPER'S VOICE: (*faintly*) Help, help. (*this leads to sobbing, and then, shrieking*)

Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party on the stairs remained motionless, through extermity of terror and awe. In the next a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb.

For the most wild yet most homely narrative which I just told you, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But tomorrow I die, and today I unburdened my soul.

MUSIC—CREDITS



# A HORSEMAN IN THE SKY

By  
Ambrose Bierce

Adapted for radio by Helaine Michaels Klein

# A HORSEMAN IN THE SKY

## CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

CARTER DRUSE

MR. DRUSE (CARTER'S FATHER)

MRS. DRUSE (CARTER'S MOTHER)

THREE CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS

COMMANDER

FEDERAL OFFICER

FEDERAL SERGEANT

### *MUSIC—up and under*

NARRATOR: In 1861 the United States of America ceased to exist. Eleven southern states, following the election of Abraham Lincoln, seceded from the Federal Union and a great war followed. It lasted until 1865. This war was known as The Civil War or The War Between the States. Historians have never quite agreed on what the main issue of the war was. Some say it was the economic rivalry between the industrial north and the agricultural south and some say that the basic issue was slavery. There were eighteen free states and fifteen slave states. The Civil War presented many personal conflicts for those fighting it. In many cases, it involved brother against brother, and in the case presented in this play, father against son. Such inner struggles occurred frequently.

No country is so wild and difficult but men will make it a theater of war; concealed in the forest at the bottom of that military rat-trap, in which half a hundred men in possession of the exits might have starved an army to submission, lay five regiments of Federal infantry. At nightfall they would take to the road again, climb to the place where their unfaithful sentinel now slept, and descending the other slope of the ridge fall upon a camp of the enemy at about midnight. Their hope was to surprise it, for the road led to the rear of it. In case of failure, their position would be perilous in the extreme; and fail they surely would should accident or vigilance apprise the enemy of the movement. We find a young Virginian named Carter Druse lying in a clump of laurel one sunny afternoon in the autumn of 1861. He had just come from his father's house. He had gone there to give his father some news:

CARTER: Father, a Union regiment has arrived at Grafton. I am going to join it.

FATHER: Well, go my son, and whatever may occur do what you conceive to be your duty.

CARTER: I hope you will not think too badly of me sir.

FATHER: (*hesitating*) You are a traitor my son. However, that does not diminish my love for you.

CARTER: I cannot help it Father. It's what I feel in my heart. You know I am in agreement with President Lincoln. You know that I don't believe the Union should be divided. I am also deeply opposed to slave labor.

FATHER: You have a right to your beliefs my son. Virginia will get on without you. Should we both live to the end of the war, we will speak further of the matter.

CARTER: I am going in to say goodbye to mother.

FATHER: Carter, she is gravely ill. It would be best if you didn't tell her everything.

CARTER: I promise Father. I will just tell her goodbye.

FATHER: Thank you.

CARTER: (*knocks on bedroom door*) Mother, may I come in?

MOTHER: (*weak voice*) Yes, my son, come in.

CARTER: Mother, how are you feeling?

MOTHER: A little better, dear. A little better.

CARTER: Mother, I just wanted to say goodbye for a while. I'm leaving today.

MOTHER: Is your regiment leaving today?

CARTER: Uh...yes. We're pulling out today.

MOTHER: Good luck son, and don't worry. We're going to win. The South is going to win.

CARTER: Uh...uh...yes mother. Of course. We're going to win. Goodbye mother.

MOTHER: Goodbye my sweet son. God be with you. (*he leaves room—closes door*)

FATHER: Son, your mother is in a most critical condition; at the best she cannot be with us longer than a few weeks.

CARTER: (*sadly*) I sensed when I was in there that I shall most likely never see her again. It hurt me very much Father, but I must go. I said goodbye to her.

FATHER: Goodbye son. God be with you.

CARTER: Goodbye Father.

NARRATOR: So Carter Druse, bowing reverently to his father, who returned the

salute with a stately courtesy that masked a breaking heart, left the home of his childhood to go soldiering. By conscience and courage, by deeds of devotion and daring, he soon commended himself to his fellows and his officers; and it was to these qualities and to some knowledge of the country that he owed his selection for his present perilous duty at the extreme outpost. Nevertheless, fatigue had been stronger than resolution and he had fallen asleep. What good or bad angel came in a dream to rouse him from his state of crime, who shall say? Without a movement, without a sound, in the profound silence and the languor of the late afternoon, some invisible messenger of fate touched with unsealing ginger the eyes of his consciousness—whispered into the ear of his spirit the mysterious awakening word which no human lips ever have spoken, no human memory ever has recalled. He quietly raised his forehead from his arm and looked between the masking stems of the laurels, instinctively closing his right hand about the stock of his rifle.

CARTER: What, what has happened. Have I slept through the war? Is the war now over? What is that I see before me? Why it looks like a statue—a soldier on a horse against the sky. No, I am wrong, for it is not a statue. It is the enemy. I must prepare my rifle. But, I cannot see the rider's face. He is turned away from me. Wait...he is starting to face me now. *(pause)* Oh my God.

*(Music up and under) (sobbing)—Music up.*

NARRATOR: Is it then so terrible to kill an enemy in war—an enemy who has surprised a secret vital to the safety of one's self and comrades—an enemy more formidable for his knowledge than all his army for its numbers? Carter Druse grew pale; he shook in every limb, turned faint, and saw the statuesque group before him as black figures, rising, falling, moving unsteadily in arcs of circles in a fiery sky. His hand fell away from his weapon, his head slowly dropped until his face rested on the leaves in which he lay. This courageous gentleman and hardy soldier was near swooning from intensity of emotion.

CARTER: *(intense sobbing)* My God...my God... I must do it. I must. *(more sobbing)*

It was not for long; in another moment his face was raised from earth, his hands resumed their places on the rifle, his forefinger sought the trigger; mind, heart, and eyes were clear, conscience and reason sound. He could not hope to capture that enemy; to alarm him would but send him dashing to his camp with his fatal news. The duty of the soldier was plain: the man must be shot dead from ambush—without warning, without a moment's spiritual preparation, with never so much as an unspoken prayer, he must be sent to his account. But no—there is a hope; he may have discovered nothing—perhaps he is but admiring the sublimity of the landscape. If permitted, he may turn and ride

carelessly away in the direction whence he came. Surely it will be possible to judge at the instant of his withdrawing whether he knows. It may well be that his fixity of attention—Druse turned his head and looked through the deeps of air downward, as from the surface to the bottom of a translucent sea. He saw creeping across the green meadow a sinuous line of figures of men and horses—some foolish commander was permitting the soldiers of his escort to water their beasts in the open, in plain view from a dozen summits.

*Sound—Horses galloping—splashing of water*

SOLDIER 1: Woe fellow. Let's make this fast. I feel Yankee eyes starin' down at me.

SOLDIER 2: Why did that dang fool of a captain make us stop here? It's dangerous.

SOLDIER 3: Suits me, this poor horse couldn't have made it much farther.

SOLDIER 1: I couldn't have made it much farther myself, *(splashes water all over himself and sips)*

Druse withdrew his eyes from the valley and fixed them again upon the group of men and horse in the sky, and again it was through the sights of his rifle. But this time his aim was at the horse. In his memory, as if they were a divine mandate, rang the words of his father at their parting:

FATHER'S VOICE: Whatever may occur, do what you conceive to be your duty.

Druse was calm now. His teeth were firmly but not rigidly closed; his nerves were as tranquil as a sleeping babe's—not a tremor affected any muscle of his body; his breathing, until suspended in the act of taking aim, was regular and slow. Duty had conquered.

DRUSE: My God, what will I do. I will aim for the horse. Peace, be still. *(he fires) (sound—rifle firing off)*

An officer of the Federal force, who in a spirit of adventure or in quest of knowledge had left the hidden bivouac in the valley, and with aimless feet had made his way to the lower edge of a small open space near the foot of the cliff, was considering what he had to gain by pushing his exploration further. At a distance of a quarter-mile before him, but apparently at a stone's throw, rose from its fringe of pines the gigantic face of rock, towering to so great a height above him that it made him giddy to look up to where its edge cut a sharp, rugged line against the sky. It presented a clean, vertical profile against a background of blue sky to a point half the way down, and of distant hills, hardly less blue, thence to the tops of the trees at its base. Lifting his eyes to the dizzy altitude of its summit the officer saw an astonishing sight—a man on horseback riding down into the valley through the air!

OFFICER: Well look up there. Looks like he's a ridin' on thin air.

Straight upright sat the rider, in military fashion, with a firm seat in the saddle, a strong clutch upon the rein to hold his charger from too impetuous a plunge. From his bare head his long hair streamed upward, waving like a plume. His hands were concealed in the cloud of the horse's lifted mane. The animal's body was as level as if every hoofstroke encountered the resistant earth. Its motions were those of a wild gallop, but even as the officer looked they ceased, with all the legs thrown sharply forward as in the act of alighting from a leap. But this was a flight!

Filled with amazement and terror by this apparition of a horseman in the sky—half believing himself the chosen scribe of some new revelation, the officer was overcome by the intensity of his emotions:

OFFICER: My legs failed me and I fell. Almost at the same instant I heard a crashing sound in the trees—a sound that died without an echo and all was still. I rose to my feet, trembling. Pulling myself together, I ran rapidly obliquely away from the cliff to a point distant from its foot; thereabout I expected to find my man; and thereabout, I naturally failed. In the fleeting instant of this vision, my imagination had been so wrought upon by the apparent grace and ease and intention of the marvelous performance, that it did not occur to me that the line of march of aerial cavalry is directly downward, and that I could have found the objects of this search at the very foot of the cliff. A half-hour later, I returned to camp. I, being a wise man, knew better than to tell the incredible truth. I said nothing of what I had seen. But then the commander questioned me:

COMMANDER: In your expedition, did you learn anything of advantage?

OFFICER: Yes, sir; there is no road leading down into this valley from the southward.

COMMANDER: (*sarcastically*) Is that so?

NARRATOR: Back at the extreme outpost, Carter Druse reloads his rifle; he is approached by a Federal sergeant.

FEDERAL SERGEANT: (*whispering*) Did you fire?

CARTER: Yes.

FEDERAL SEARGEANT: At what?

CARTER: A horse. It was standing on yonder rock—pretty far out. You see it is no longer there. It went over the cliff.

NARRATOR: Druse's face was white, but he showed no other sign of emotion. Having answered, he turned away his eyes and said no more. The sergeant did not understand.

FEDERAL SERGEANT: See here. Druse, (*pause*) It's no use making a mystery. I order you to report. Was there anybody on the horse?

CARTER: (*weakly*) Yes.

FEDERAL SERGEANT: Well?

CARTER: (*half-sobbing*) My father.

FEDERAL SERGEANT:: Good God.

*MUSIC—up and under*

narrator: What does one do in a situation in which one must make a choice between two alternatives, both of which may be wrong morally? Carter Druse felt obliged to join an army. That decision thrust upon him a whole new set of responsibilities. He must destroy the enemy; he had a duty to protect his comrades, but the army code does not say how one's military obligations affect his other responsibilities—duty to God, or to family. Thus, Carter Druse was forced into a situation in which either decision he made seemed morally wrong.

After the war ended, many soldiers like Carter Druse returned home with heavy consciences, their enemy having been, in many cases, their own brethren. In spite of all the sorrow and pain caused, the Civil War did accomplish many things. It ended slave labor, it settled the question of whether a state could secede, and it cemented the union of the United States of America.

*MUSIC—CREDITS*



# **RICHARD CORY**

A Television Play based on the poem by  
**Edward Arlington Robinson**

Adaptation by Helaine Michaels Klein

# RICHARD CORY

## CHARACTERS

RICHARD CORY  
FATHER BAILEY  
INVESTIGATOR STONE  
NEWSPAPER REPORTER  
LAW CLERK  
VELMA  
DIANA  
TOWNSPEOPLE

*Camera moves in on Richard Cory walking through the Public Square. He is smiling, impeccably dressed, and greeting all the townspeople as they glance at him in admiration. Titles appear on screen as the above scene continues. The first two stanzas of the poem are recited.*

VOICE-OVER (FATHER BAILEY):

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,  
    We people on the pavement looked at him;  
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,  
    Clean favored, and imperially slim.  
And he was always quietly arrayed,  
    And he was always human when he talked;  
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,  
    “Good-morning,” and he glittered when he walked.

*MUSIC—up and under*

## SCENE 1

*Camera overview—Small town (eastern part of anywhere U.S.A.). A crowd of uproarious people are in the Public Square. Everyone is talking at once. We hear little fragments of conversation.*

1ST WOMAN: I don't believe it—not Richard Cory. He couldn't have.

2ND WOMAN: But he had no reason. The man had everything.

3ND WOMAN: (*crying*) He was so handsome, so elegant. I will miss him so.

1ST MAN: Why would someone who had so much to live for go and do a thing like that?

4TH WOMAN: (*crying*) He saved my baby. He was such a great man. Oh this is terrible.

3RD WOMAN: I will miss seeing his beautiful smile. It was just yesterday that he smiled and said “good morning.”

3RD WOMAN’S HUSBAND: You never tell me I have a beautiful smile. Big deal, Cory wasn’t all that great.

3RD WOMAN: How dare you speak that way of Richard Cory. He was an exceptional man.

1ST MAN: Did anyone hear how he did it?

2ND MAN: Gun—with a gun. Shot himself right in the head.

1ST MAN: Where did they find him?

1ST woman: In his bedroom.

3RD woman: Did he leave a note?

4TH woman: I don’t think so.

*An official-looking man enters the scene carrying a document. He is a law clerk with the local law firm. People start rushing up to him and questioning him.*

1ST MAN: Did they find out why he did it?

LAW CLERK: *(evading questions; shouts)* May I have everyone’s attention please.

*(Voices quiet down after a few seconds)*

A few minutes ago Counselor Barrow went over Richard Cory’s last will and testament. It would appear that Mr. Cory left his entire estate to this town and its inhabitants.

*(Voices of townspeople—shrieks and sighs of exclamation)*

You will all be notified to attend the public reading of the will.

*(People’s reactions—some are laughing and crying at the same time. We hear the following dialogue amidst the other chatter.)*

Bless you, bless you, dear Richard Cory.  
God watch over his soul.

3RD WOMAN’S HUSBAND: *(close-up)* Say, you were right, Richard Cory was an exceptional man. *(his wife gives him a dirty look and then bursts into tears)*

*MUSIC up—Fade out*

## SCENE 2

*Camera fades in to exterior view of Episcopal Church—Cut to interior view of Father Bailey's study. Investigator Stone and newspaper reporter are questioning Father Bailey:*

INVESTIGATOR STONE: Father, can you give us any information at all on Cory?

FATHER BAILEY: I would like to help in any way I can, but you know everything that Richard told me was in confidence. He left no note, which means that he did not want the circumstances of his death made public. This is going to be very difficult for me. Is it really necessary for you to know all the details?

INVESTIGATOR STONE: Father, all deaths must be investigated, whether they are murder or suicide. That is the law.

FATHER BAILEY: But is it necessary to have a newspaper reporter present?

NEWSPAPER REPORTER: Sorry, Father, I was sent on this assignment, I didn't ask for it. Besides Cory was the most well-known man in this town; not only this town, but all over the eastern United States. People are interested in what happened to him. The paper is obliged to print what people want to read.

FATHER BAILEY: Well, I surely don't want you to lose your job, nor do I want to break the law, for that matter. I'll try to cooperate.

INVESTIGATOR STONE: Thank you, Father, we'd appreciate it. Cory came to this town, it seems, from out of nowhere. Do you know where he came from?

FATHER BAILEY: I believe he came here from Boston. He worked for a bank up there. He wanted to start his own business and thought he might do well in this town. He told me that he came here to make a fresh start. You know the rest. He has prospered extremely well.

NEWSPAPER REPORTER: Does he have any family? Has he ever been married?

FATHER BAILEY: *(hesitantly)* Yes...there was a wife. There was a divorce, I believe.

INVESTIGATOR STONE: Any children?

FATHER BAILEY: Yes, one daughter. However, she died. Very unfortunate—it was an accident.

INVESTIGATOR STONE: What sort of accident?

FATHER BAILEY: Richard came to me one day and said he had to talk to someone. He was very upset. I never had any idea that he was so unhappy.

*(Extreme close-up of Father Bailey; extreme close-up of his forehead as he recollects)*

Richard Cory, how that poor man suffered; how badly he wanted to make amends.

*Camera cuts away to flashback—Music*

*Camera fades in on Father Bailey and Richard. It is six months prior to Richard's death.*

FATHER BAILEY: Go on Richard, continue.

RICHARD: It was just as simple as that Father, I was nothing but a coward.

FATHER BAILEY: Richard, no, not a coward. You suffered from a phobia. It is an illness that can strike anyone.

RICHARD: No one can imagine how I felt—watching her in the water, seeing her go under and *(crying)*... Father, I couldn't, I couldn't rescue her.

FATHER BAILEY: But Richard, even if you *had* jumped in that water you might not have been able to save her. It doesn't take very long to drown. It can happen in seconds. Richard, you must not carry this guilt around with you the rest of your life.

RICHARD: I really didn't want to go to the lake that day, but I was too ashamed to tell Velma about my fear of the water. Besides, I didn't want to deprive Diana of the chance to learn to swim. Velma was a good swimmer, but she had gone back to the lakehouse to fix us a picnic lunch. After we buried Diana, I left everything behind and came to this town, started all over again. Velma went her own way too.

FATHER BAILEY: Richard, do you try to see your ex-wife?

RICHARD: I've been trying to communicate with her ever since it happened. She will not see me. She puts the entire blame for Diana's death on me. The last time I tried she said that I should never bother her again. She remarried a few months ago and does not want to be reminded of the past. She adored our daughter just as I did. She'll never forgive me, never understand. When Diana died, everything between us was over.

FATHER BAILEY: I'm sorry, Richard. I didn't realize how final things were between you. I rather hoped that Velma would one day be a source of comfort for you.

RICHARD: Comfort is what I come to you for, Father. Your listening helps more than anything else. I really don't expect to find total peace within myself ever again. That's why I throw myself into the business. I've

made more money in the last five years than anyone else in this country. I have the finest house, the finest clothes, the finest food, the best wine, and yet I have nothing. If only those people who gape at me in the Public Square knew. If they only knew.

FATHER BAILEY: You've been very charitable to those people, Richard. Most of them are alive today because of you. It was so kind of you to build that shelter for the homeless and to provide food and clothing. And Richard, what about the other things you've done—setting up all those scholarship funds and the building of the hospital. You've so many people grateful to you.

RICHARD: *(close-up)* There's only one thing I don't have, and that's my family.

*(Close-up of Richard transforms into close-up of Father Bailey)*

FATHER BAILEY: Yes, Richard Cory, everyone in this town admired him. I'll never forget the day of that fire. He was just coming out of his office when he discovered it.

*(Close-up of Investigator Stone and Newspaper Reporter as they listen intently)*

*(Camera cuts away to flashback—a day 2 years prior to Richard's death)*

*Richard Cory steps out of his office, which is a two-story building. He starts up the street where a family—a mother, father—and two children—are screaming. Their modest home is all in flames. Richard quickly takes off his jacket, throws it on the ground, and enters the blazing building. He comes out a few minutes later carrying the child in his arms. He is coughing heavily. He hands the child to its mother and then collapses.*

FATHER BAILEY: *(voice-over)* Richard Cory. What a paradox. A phobia for water but no fear of fire. And though he was unable to rescue his own daughter, he was able to fetch that child away from those flames. So you see, gentlemen, we cannot look inside a man's heart and know all that goes on there. *(To newspaper reporter)* Well, do you have your story now?

NEWSPAPER REPORTER: Uh...yes, I believe so.

FATHER BAILEY: What will you print?

*(Camera pans both men. They are very moved by what Father Bailey has told them.)*

NEWSPAPER REPORTER: That Richard Cory was despondent over the death of his daughter. That she drowned accidentally...that should be sufficient.

FATHER BAILEY: And you. Investigator Stone. How will your report read?

INVESTIGATOR STONE: My report? Oh yes. Well, Father, we just wanted to be sure that there was no foul play involved. It will say on the report that the reason for Cory's suicide was because of depression, or something to that effect.

FATHER BAILEY: Thank you, gentlemen.

*MUSIC—Fade out*

### SCENE 3

*Camera cuts in to the scene of Richard Cory's funeral held in the Public Square. It is a hot and humid August day. The men are coatless and some of them are wiping the sweat from their brows. The women are fanning themselves. Audio cuts in on the end of Father Bailey's eulogy:*

FATHER BAILEY: ...And so, dear Richard Cory, we are about to lay you to rest. Our hearts are heavy on this day, for you will most assuredly be missed by all of us. We thank you for all your kindness and generosity, and we send you to our Maker asking for compassion, understanding, and forgiveness. To all of you, the people of this town, I ask that you stop questioning and please remember the proverb, "Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy."

*Camera overview of crowd focuses in on close-up of woman standing behind the others. She has tears in her eyes. Close-up of woman fades in to flashback. Music. Richard and this woman (audience will immediately surmise that she is Velma) on their wedding day. They are embracing.*

RICHARD: I love you, Mrs. Cory.

VELMA: I love you too, Richard, and I am so happy to be Mrs. Richard Cory. Think of all the wonderful years we're going to have together. Richard, I'm so happy.

*They embrace again—Music (Allegro) Scene fades in to Richard and Velma running along a lakeside with their small child, Diana. They are laughing and running. Velma breaks away from them and starts walking away from the lake. She waves at them and indicates that she will be back shortly. Richard playfully tosses Diana over his shoulders. He puts Diana back on the ground. She starts running toward the lake. Fade back in to close-up of Velma. The crowd begins to disperse and she remains standing. After everyone leaves, she approaches Father Bailey.*

WOMAN: Father, may I speak to you a moment?

FATHER BAILEY: *(studying her for a few seconds)* Can it be? Can it really be?

WOMAN: You know who I am.

FATHER BAILEY: You are Velma, are you not?

WOMAN: Yes, Father, I am Velma. I am one day too late. *(She opens her purse and takes out a letter sealed in an envelope.)* Father, I was going to mail this yesterday, and then I heard...! heard what happened. Here, take it. I must go. Father, please read it, and then...please, Father, if you can, if it is possible, please bury it with Richard. Thank you. *(She exits.) (Father Bailey opens the envelope and starts to read the letter.) (Close-up of handwritten letter.)*

*MUSIC*

VOICE-OVER (VELMA'S VOICE): Dear Richard, I would like a chance to meet with you and discuss the tragic events of five years ago. Although I have tried to forget about Diana and you, the memories of our life together haunt me every day.

*Camera focuses in on the letter being inserted in the coffin (close-up of hand placing letter in Richard Cory's lifeless hand). Voice-over continues:*

Richard, I think I am ready to forgive you. I cannot bear this hurt any longer. My husband who is a fine and wonderful man has urged me to contact you.

*Coffin closes*

I think we can help each other to bury the pain and keep alive the memory of our dear and wonderful girl. Sincerely, Velma.

*Full shot of coffin being lowered into the ground.*

VOICE-OVER (FATHER BAILEY):

And he was rich—yes, richer than a king,  
And admirably schooled in every grace;  
In fine, we thought that he was everything  
To make us wish that we were in his place.  
So on we worked, and waited for the light,  
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;  
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,  
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

*MUSIC—CREDITS*



